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ABSTRACT

An individualized reading program was instituted in several terminal classes at the sophomore and junior levels in a Sacramento, California, high school. The students read at levels ranging from virtual nonreaders to seventh grade and did not intend to go to school after high school. The program involved transforming the classroom arrangement to include tables and chairs, assorted audiovisual equipment, typewriters, and a library of materials. Kits of materials such as job application forms and sociodramas were available. Study guides suggested how to develop reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills and an appreciation for literature. All activities and materials emphasized teenage interests such as getting a job, owning a car, and having fun. Class size was limited to 20, a teacher was selected for his rapport with students and received inservice training in teaching reading, and a teacher aide and volunteers were hired to take care of the clerical work, tutoring, and record keeping. Vocabulary building, critical thinking, word attack skills, and comprehension were the primary reading skills developed in the students. Positive attitudes toward reading were encouraged through oral activities such as drama, discussions, and oral reading. (AL)

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A Departmentalized Senior High School Reading Program

by Elaine Stowe

Sacramento City Unified School District serves the capital city and has a school population of approximately 53,000 in kindergarten through grade 12. Sacramento Senior High School, one of four senior high schools, has a heterogeneous population of approximately 2,500 students, coming from such culturally different neighborhoods as the River Park District, where many of the State College professors have their homes, to the Oak Park District, where each year there is a sizable immigration of Negroes from the Deep South. The other major minority groups are Mexican-Americans and Orientals. Almost daily there are new enrollments of students from Mexico and Hong Kong, who speak not a word of English.

Evaluators of the English curriculum of Sacramento High School found that the greatest need of the majority of students was for the development of reading skills that would enable them to succeed in their school work and in their outside-of-school activities.

The educational philosophy of the high schools in the district is implemented through what is termed a "goal-centered curriculum." Each student indicates his professional or occupational goal and enrolls in corresponding courses- high school terminal courses for the student who is not planning to go to college, junior college preparatory courses for the student who plans to attend college for two years, and the four-year college-preparatory course for the student who plans to enter a four-year college or who plans to attend a junior college and then transfer to a four-year-college or university.

Students in the high school terminal classes are generally poor readers, with some students being virtual nonreaders and others having varying levels of reading skills, with seventh grade reading ability being the upper limit. Students with reading ability higher than seventh grade are counseled to move to junior college preparatory classes.

In the traditional program, as many as 35 of these students were placed in one class and given reading materials that required at least tenth grade reading ability. Under these conditions the students not only made little progress in reading but many of them actually regressed. As a result of their lack of success, the attitudes of the students were deplorable- they either vegetated or they behaved obnoxiously. They could see no reason for taking the required courses of English. In order to alleviate these undesirable conditions and to motivate these students to learn to read, English Language Laboratories were established in Sacramento Senior High School. A teacher in the school describes the establishment of the laboratories as "the beginning of a new day following a dark night."

To accommodate all the high school terminal sophomores and juniors, four traditional English classrooms were selected to be transformed into laboratories for the 24 classes that were required every day. The rooms were completely refurnished with modern lighting, acoustical treatment, blackout curtains, and new furniture and were provided with abundant electrical outlets. Tables and chairs were substituted for the traditional desks. The mechanical equipment for each laboratory included eight typewriters, a movie projector, an overhead projector, a phonograph, a filmstrip projector with tachistoscopic attachment, a listening station, tape recorders, a controlled reader, reading accelerators,

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table screens, and a wall screen.

It was necessary that the reading materials selected for the laboratories provide for the development of basic reading skills on an elementary level but, at the same time, they had to be of interest to teenagers. The materials provided included almost everything published that had been tested and had proved to be effective for use by students of the type enrolled in high school terminal classes. These materials represented a wide range of reading levels and included reading and spelling laboratories; readers developed for teenage students with low reading abilities; spellers; short stories; dramas; science books; occupational-oriented stories, both factual and fictional; biographies; district-prepared consumable materials; encyclopedias; and dictionaries. Filmstrips, films, records, tapes, and transparencies purchased for these classes were made available through a special library section of the district's audiovisual department.

The English curriculum for the high school terminal student was designed to enable each student to achieve the following objectives:

To realize the importance and the need for further development of the basic skills of reading, speaking, listening, writing, and spelling.
To develop positive attitudes toward self and toward life.
To learn to express an idea in a complete statement, both orally and in writing.
To develop the desire to stay in school.
To gain understanding of literature and to find pleasure in reading stories.
To gain insights for personal growth from reading good literature.
To develop skills and attitudes that will make him employable.

As a means of helping students to achieve these goals, teaching study guides were developed to help teachers make the courses interesting, effective, and balanced. In these guides activities were suggested for the development of reading skills and desirable attitudes, for improving speaking habits and listening skills, for extending writing skills and improving spelling skills, and for making literature interesting. Most of the activities suggested in these guides were directly connected with some of the chief interests of teenagers, such as, owning a car, getting a job, and having fun.

Accompanying these guides were Students' Materials Kits that supplied the teacher with materials to implement the lessons in the guides. In the kits were such items as job application blanks, sociodramas, message forms, telegraph blanks, pictures that provided topics for compositions, telephone message blanks, message tapes, and job interview tapes. The use of kits permitted teachers to spend their time in the preparation of lessons and in teaching, rather than in searching for or preparing materials and duplicating them. Consumable materials were stockpiled so that they might be reordered from the central library as needed.

Human factors were considered also in the establishing of English Language Laboratories. First under consideration was that the number of students in high school terminal classes should not exceed a maximum of 20 students; a larger number would have precluded the individual work that these students sorely needed. Federal funds permitted the necessary reduction of class size. All who worked in the program agreed that reduction of class size was indispensable to a successful

program, and they placed it as the chief factor in the success of the program.

The second human factor to be considered was the selection of the right teacher for this program. This step was obviously vital for the success of the students. The teacher, it was thought, must be interested in teenagers and individuals; must have a warm, outgoing nature that would enable him to establish rapport with these students, who often tend to be difficult; and must be able to derive satisfaction from any progress the students made, even though they might fall short of achieving the goals of the program.

The high school English teacher who has had training in the teaching of reading is so rare as to be virtually nonexistent, yet the teaching of reading is the main activity of the English Language Laboratory. In-service training had to be provided in order to get teachers of English to recognize the need for teaching reading in secondary schools and to acquaint them with techniques that can be employed. Through demonstrations, individual conferences, and summer workshops the teachers received much additional training. The in-service program continued throughout the year, and teachers received individual guidance as they needed or requested it. Teachers were informed quickly of any new techniques developed, and new materials were always made available as soon as possible.

A third human factor in the success of the English Language Laboratory was the teacher aide, an adult assistant who helped the teacher in every conceivable way but whose prime function was tutoring individual students. After the teacher had presented a lesson, the aide helped the student who didn't know how to start; she helped the student who had been absent; and she gave individual students help wherever needed.

By doing all of the clerical work, the aide released the teacher for her most important function--teaching. The aide took roll, checked objective tests, recorded grades, typed ditto masters and duplicated them, prepared bulletin board displays, and did the filing. Since several teachers used the same laboratory during the day, the aide was responsible for keeping the room attractive. She checked the bookshelves for orderliness; saw that the mechanical equipment was in good working order, was available when needed, and was stored in a designated place after use; and kept an inventory of supplies and equipment. The aide also operated the projectors. In addition, the teacher aide kept a complete reading progress record for each student. The record was cumulative, and the card went into the student's permanent record for the use of the teachers in the ensuing years.

The teachers agreed unanimously that, after the reduced class size, the second most important factor in the success of the laboratories was the teacher aide.

A fourth human factor in the success of the language arts laboratories was discovered as a result of being unable to provide a sufficient number of adult teacher aides. More aides were needed so the school experimented with using students as teacher assistants. Volunteers were recruited from study halls. The assistants, of course, had no tutorial duties, but they relieved the teachers of many clerical duties. The success of this program far exceeded expectations, for student assistants in most cases were just as efficient as the adult aides. The program was extended beyond high school by assigning student assistants to teachers of junior college preparatory classes and four-year-college-preparatory classes. A bonus from this program came when some of the student assistants became interested

in teaching as a career.

Since the development of reading skills is the main purpose of the laboratory program, the teacher must plan carefully for the reading activities for the year. An "Interest Inventory," supplied in the student's kit, was completed by the students the first day of the semester and thus provided teachers with useful information on reading abilities, disabilities, and interests. In order to plan a reading program, however, the teacher must know the reading skills of each student; so emphasis was placed on diagnosing student needs and supplying proper materials and careful instruction to meet their needs. Since the teachers were not reading experts, the method of diagnosis was made relatively simple. Tests that were used for diagnostic purposes were the Metropolitan Achievement Test and the Gilmore Oral Reading Tests. Accurate interpretation of the test results required considerable experience. Simple reading placement tests were produced by the district to provide a quick means whereby teachers could determine approximate reading levels of students and find their most glaring reading deficiencies. Materials and techniques were tailored to meet the needs revealed by diagnoses. As one means of evaluation, another form of the Metropolitan Reading Test was given at the end of the school year.

It was found that a high percentage of the students needed to develop reading comprehension and word-attack skills; much emphasis was given, therefore, to the development of these skills. Filmstrips that provided for sequential development of the sounds of vowels and consonants and for the development of phoneme-grapheme relationships proved to be particularly valuable. A tachistoscopic attachment was used wherever its use seemed appropriate for group work. Besides class work in word-attack skills, viewers and table screen were provided for individual use.

Many of the materials used in the laboratories provided for instruction and practice in structural analysis. Specially prepared transparencies used on the overhead projector were very effective in aiding students in strengthening this particular skill.

Vocabulary building was stressed in every reading lesson. In the literature lessons, special emphasis was given to teaching students how to get the meaning of words from context. Transparencies which presented interesting and important words in context were prepared for every story and used on the overhead projector. The context clues were analyzed and through discussion, the students arrived at the definition of the word being studied. All meanings were verified by using dictionaries, which were provided in class sets so that every student had one available at all times.

Critical thinking and evaluation of what was read were emphasized and developed through group discussion and through discussion of students' written evaluations.

The "listen and read" technique was used whenever there was a class assignment that some of the students could not read. Each laboratory had a specially wired table, equipped with head phones, to use as a listening station. Some specially prepared materials were duplicated and taped, and the students who were at a low reading level went to the listening station and followed the duplicated copy as they listened to the tape.

This procedure enabled them to take part in class discussions or in any other activities that followed the reading of the script. Previously, in the conventional classroom, these poorer readers had either pretended they read the assignment or had gone to sleep.

In addition to the reading program there was a comprehensive literature program that was conducted concurrently throughout the year. Frequently, the teacher read the class a story, a poem, or a scene from a play, or played a record or a tape. Thus students learned to appreciate material that was beyond their ability to read by themselves. Poetry appreciation and environment were also enhanced through group or unison reading.

Drama proved to be one of the most useful and stimulating media for high school terminal students. Plays were found to be of great value for motivating students to read, discuss, listen to, particpate in interpreting roles, read aloud, or tape interpretations. To further motivate students through the use of drama study trips were taken as frequently as possible. It was sometimes possible to get free admission for a class to attend a dress rehearsal of a play being presented by one of the local colleges or by the local repertory theatre; occasionally there were special student rates. With the help of Federal funds it became possible to provide bus transportatation to take students to hear and to see some of the plays. Discussion of the plays stimulated good speaking techniques and resulted in improved oral communication. Not only did drama stimulate oral discussion, it also served to stimulate writing that ranged from simple summaries to thoughtful evaluations, depending upon individual capabilities.

Oral activities held a prominent place in the English Language Laboratories. These students generally had trouble formulating questions. Before a speaker was to appear before the group, practice sessions were held; questions were formulated, and each student taped a question to determine how well he spoke. Each student was then encouraged to ask his question of the speaker.

Many class discussions were directed in such a manner that students learned correct techniques of participating in discussions. Many of the discussions dealt with problems concerning being courteous to speakers and other discussants. Frequently the discussions were taped and played back so that the students could evaluate their discussions and plan how to improve.

One of the best means for developing spontaneous oral expression was found to be the use of the sociodrama. Students, through role playing, learned to present a point and stick to it, to ask questions, and to answer questions effectively and courteously.

Learning to give directions and to follow directions are essential skills for students who plan to enter some occupation upon completion of high school. Much emphasis was given, therefore, to listening, following, and giving oral directions as well as to writing clear, concise directions and in following written directions.

Listening skills were developed concurrently with all lessons, and special lessons in listening were developed and used with these students. At the beginning of the school year students were given an informal diagnostic listening test, and throughout the year other listening tests were given in order to measure progress. The interest of students in getting part-time jobs during their school years or in full employment after graduation was capitalized upon to develop listening skills

in practical situations, such as taking telephone messages and writing them down accurately and listening to taped job interviews.

Daily newspapers provided the bases for many reading, speaking, and writing activities. A local newspaper provided copies once a week for each student. Many of the students who had never read newspapers became newspaper readers. They became interested in the front page makeup, weather reports, teenage activities, accident reports, letters to the editor, and editorials. Surprisingly enough, they were most interested in the financial page and each selected a stock and kept a record of its gains or losses.

One innovation that perhaps brought about the greatest salutory change in student attitudes was the introduction of typewriters into the reading, writing, and spelling program. In each sophomore class in the laboratory, students were oriented to the use of typewriters. Fifty to seventy-five percent of the students received typing lessons. They were encouraged to use typewriters for additional practice to improve their skills. Those who had no previous typing were taught the typewriter keyboard in six lessons. All students were urged to make use of this opportunity to develop their typing skills because of the importance of typing in helping them get jobs. The major objective in use of the typewriter, however, was to improve spelling and composition. Specially prepared programmed spelling lessons for the typewriter proved to be very successful.

Senior classes were introduced to this program. Once a week students had the use of a laboratory and typewriters for writing their compositions. Not only did the use of typewriters improve the students' spelling and skill in writing paragraphs and longer compositions it had a beneficial effect upon attendance as well. Teachers reported that on the day students used the typewriters, attendance was very nearly perfect even though the typing day was Monday, a day of usually very poor attendance.

Permeating the entire English curriculum was the consistent, continuous attempt to improve student attitudes and responsibilities toward themselves, others, and society. Special lessons, suggested in the guides, were designed to assist teachers in this important task. The materials used included films, literature, plays, live and taped job interviews, and class discussions.

There was definite improvement in student attitudes as a result of the English laboratories. Students reacted favorably to the attractive room environment, the new equipment and materials, the smaller class size, and the techniques employed by teachers. Lessons centered about their needs and their interests made them feel that the English course had meaning for them, that it was important, and that it could be enjoyable.

Under the traditional program, students similar to those in the laboratory courses rarely worked throughout a period; they spent time in misbehavior, sleeping, or doing nothing. In contrast, it was an exception when a student enrolled in the English laboratory did not work throughout the entire period. Attitudes toward developing skill in reading improved greatly. Teachers in other subject areas reported that many of these students began working much more diligently than they did formerly. Administrators, counselors, and teachers reported that the number of discipline problems was greatly reduced; rarely was one of these students referred to a counselor. Administrators supported the program enthus-

iastically. They felt that if there had been no other benefits, the improvement in student attitudes justified the effort expended and the expense involved in implementing this program.

Plans were made to offer a similar program to students enrolled in junior college preparatory courses.

The strength of the program lay in its reaching the individual student so that he was motivated to learn to read and to express himself in acceptable English. The weakness of the program was in the lack of teacher training in teaching reading. Through in-service training, with a corps of teachers who were eager and willing to learn on the job, this handicap was gradually removed.